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Kempkers, Harriet Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Ann Weller

Oral History Interview with
Harriet Kempkers

Conducted March 31, 1997
by Ann Weller

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Interviewer: Ann Weller

AW: This is Harriet Kempkers, and we're happy to be interviewing her today. We talked some about your early life, and I wondered if you could tell me a little bit about what it was like for you, growing up in this area, and what your family was like.

HK: I had four brothers and a sister. I have to say this first, we have a good heritage. They taught us to work, they taught us to be honest and those things have helped me through all of my life.

AW: When you were an adult, where did you live in this area?

HK: I lived south of Holland until I was 21, and then I married and moved to Hamilton. And now after my husband is gone, I'm back here again in Holland. I have spent the early years of my life, and these last, maybe twelve, fifteen years in Holland again. Both of my parents' backgrounds were with the pioneers that came in 1847. I'm proud of my background. My parents' had grandparents that were hardworking, thrifty, and they had a very, very good background with Jesus Christ as their Savior.

AW: What kinds of things did your parents tell you about when they were first in this area, or stories they remember from the very early days of Holland?

HK: My parents, or my grandparents, which do you want to hear?

AW: Maybe both.

HK: Okay, my grandparents left Europe because they couldn't worship the way they felt they should. It was a state religion, state church, and they met in small groups until

they didn't feel safe doing that anymore. That was the big reason they came here. But it wasn't easy to come here. There was just nothing but woods. They had to clear the land and there was sickness, a lot of sickness, no good water at first. They could cultivate just small patches of ground, because they had to get rid of all the trees. And then on top of that, the trees, they had to use those for buildings. There was no sawmill here in Holland, they had to haul to Singapore, which is out towards Saugatuck, and have it sawed into lumber, all kinds of lumber. Those people with their Dutch language, they had a rough time with that, going over there to Singapore. I remember one man told about, he got somebody to go and haul a load of lumber from Singapore, but he couldn't talk English, and so they said all they had to do was say was, "Lumber for Nudding." Nudding must have been the name of the man. But when they got there they said, "We don't have lumber for nothing." And so he had to come back again to Holland without lumber, because that's the way they had to start with their language. It was pretty tough for some of those people. But, they made it.

AW: Were your grandparents, then, part of the original settlers of Holland?

HK: My great-grandparents came in 1847, and my grandmother, my mother's mother, was born here in this country. They just had visiting ministers here, so when my grandmother was eight days old, her father carried her through the woods to the church, so she could be baptized. Because they might not have a minister again for a long time. So that was the other reason I admire them, because that meant so much to them, to come over here. Their freedom to worship the way they felt they should,

and to make a living here, it was pretty hard. My mom and my dad, being the next generation, remember a lot of those things, and they often talked about that.

AW: What were your great-grandparents' names, and did they come from the Netherlands then, or somewhere else in Europe?

HK: The Netherlands, and there's a little section that sometimes it was Germany, and sometimes it was the Netherlands. That's where some of them came from. I think most of them in that area, more or less. Let's see, my mom's parents were Scholten, and my father's were Rutgers. But they all came from that same area, sort of, to this Holland area because they knew about Van Raalte having been here. He came just before they did, so I think that's the reason they came to this area.

AW: So they knew that Van Raalte and some families had come to the United States, and then made their way from Buffalo, or that area, to Detroit, and then to Holland. And so they came because those people were here?

HK: Yes, because those people were here.

AW: Had they known any of them before they came, do you think?

HK: I never heard about them knowing anyone, only, just the talk that was over there, Van Raalte had come here. But, I don't think that they knew anybody. I never heard of anyone. Some of them married into other families, but I think that they were all, more or less, the same kind of people. And of course, they talk Dutch, and there are different dialects in the Dutch, but they made it. They all got together, and they were different than some of these people that came from over there. They came here to live, but they were going to keep on talking Dutch. They weren't going to be

Americans, they only wanted a better place to live. So every once in a while, you ran into these people that refused to talk English.

AW: Do you remember family stories about when they started to learn English, or were they also opposed to, they also did not want to give up the Dutch?

HK: No, I think that some people were better at that than others, but more or less, they came to this country and if they came over here they were going to talk English. My husband's grandfather said that he wasn't going to learn to talk English. I Dutch, Floyd asked him, "Well, why? You were here so long." He said it in Dutch, but it meant "I hated it!" My grandparents went ahead and talked English. It was hard for some of them, but they were going to talk English. They talked Dutch by themselves, but when they talked to us, they talked English.

AW: How about your grandmother teaching English?

HK: Oh yes, that's right! I forgot about that. My grandmother, that was my father's mother, they might have even come earlier in 1847, than some of these people. They landed in Allegan, and of course Allegan wasn't Dutch, so she learned to talk English there. Then she came to Holland when she was a little bit older, and she could talk English. She had classes, in school, with older people, because she could talk English.

AW: How old would she have been when she was teaching other people English?

HK: I would say maybe 18, 20, which was very unusual for a married woman to be teaching school. But along with her family, and all that, she still taught a lot of these people to talk English. So they didn't have to go to Singapore and say, "Lumber for

Nudding." (laughter)

AW: I think one of the original settlers was named Nudding, or something similar to that.

HK: I think so, something like that. There were some people in Holland, he worked at Lokker Rutgers, and his name was Notier, and he's the man that told the story.

AW: Do you remember other kinds of things they told you about what life was like then? I mean, they had to use the wood that was there for their homes, or what did they do for a living, farming, or other kinds of...

HK: They had to just clear a little bit of land, so that they could plant a little, a few potatoes, and my dad's father had to walk to Allegan for flour. When my grandpa got old enough to be able to carry just a little bit, he had to walk along. That was surely, twenty miles or maybe more, but they walked that far, until Holland grew enough that they could get things here. But that's where they got their first stuff. People settled wherever they could, and if they wanted to come and see each other, they had to walk through the woods, of course. If they stayed a little bit too late, and it got dark, they had blazed a trail through the woods. They sat down in the woods, and waited for daylight, because they would have got lost in the woods. That's a thing that I remember that they talked about. And of course they came through the fire, the Chicago fire. Grandpa and Grandma Defrell put some furniture in the well, but the fire didn't really hit them too much.

AW: So they saved things by putting the in the well?

HK: Yes, and some of the people loaded up what they could in their wagons and tried to outrun the fire, and the fire was all over. But neither my dad's or my mom's

grandparents lost a lot in the fire, it sort of wound up here.

AW: They probably didn't have a lot of time, but did they talk about what they did for recreation?

HK: I think that they were much too tired! I don't think that they could do much outside of...their Bible, of course, they brought their Bible and their books, which meant a lot to them. They had the books that really meant something to them, and those were some of the things that they carried, when they came across. Some of the people were on the ocean, Oh how long, there was no wind, and they were sail boats, and ...

AW: So, they came all they way across the ocean on sail boats?

HK: Yes, the first ones did, they came in sail boats.

AW: So, did they bring household goods, or were they just kind of limited to some books and some clothing?

HK: Some books and some things that were very precious to them, and often, they had to get rid of it on the way over, they had to get rid of some of their things, because there was no room for it and the sailboats, they were too heavy. They didn't bring a lot of things.

AW: Did they ever talk about something they had brought with them and to leave off the ship, or that got lost? Or were there other objects that they managed to get all the way here that were especially meaningful?

HK: I don't think that the older people the, the ones in 1847, could bring much of anything. Floyd, my husband's grandparents, came in the early 1900s. They did bring some things that they wanted, but I never heard that any of these original

1847s, that they brought anything. I never heard of that. All the things that they given to us are things that they got over here.

AW: Did they start a church here?

HK: Their building is something that's supposed to look like the original church that they built. But I don't think any of my people went to that Old Wing Mission. I think that they settled over here, and met the best way they could until they built whatever they built.

AW: Did they ever talk about their contacts with the Native Americans who were here?

HK: No, I never heard them talk about the Indians, I think they had started to move out a little bit already, well Van Raalte was farther east over there. But no, I never heard them talk about the Indians. I don't know about that.

AW: And what would they do if someone got sick? Was it home remedies?

HK: Oh yes. I don't know if this is anything you want, but my Dad's older sister had an infection in her leg, and of course they didn't have the things they have now, and they finally had to amputate that, just with whatever tools they had. There was no anesthetic. I always remember that my Grandma Rutgers said, "That was one of the hardest things that she had had to do, was to set away one of Grace's shoes that she couldn't wear, her leg was gone. And there was a lot of TB at that time. I know that my Dad's older sister, they still took her to Denver because that was better for people that had TB. But she was too sick, she died there. He had another sister, he was the youngest in the family, these other sisters were quite a bit older, but she also died of TB. What were some of the other ones, what was their sickness? There were

no doctors, it was only what you could do at home for them. It was an awfully hard life, and I have to say they came because they could worship the Lord the way they wanted to. That was their big reason for coming.

AW: And how would you say, on the whole, they were glad they had come?

HK: Oh yes! I never heard anyone say, "I wish we had stayed." I am sure they were glad. And we were glad too they came! (laughter)

AW: What would school have been like for the children, was that at home, or was there a community school after a while?

HK: My Dad and Mother both went to a school and they had teachers from Allegan, and they could talk English. They were always proud of that, they both graduated from the eighth grade, they took their exams and made it. They were proud of that. Everybody didn't do that, they only cared to talk enough English so that they could earn money.

AW: Was school a long part of the day, or shorter than today?

HK: Oh yes! Nine o'clock in the morning until three-thirty in the afternoon, you went to school. You had a lunch period. We did, and they did too, you had to study. It wasn't easy. They weren't easy on you. And that's good.

AW: Was school the same kind of schedule as today, like September to June?

HK: Yes, and of course we walked to school, there were no school buses. Some people had a good horse, but most of the people just had work horses. So if it was, now I'm speaking for myself, if the weather was awfully bad, and there was an awful lot of snow, it could be that the store would let somebody take all of us kids to school so

we didn't have to walk. But that didn't happen very often.

AW: How far did you have to walk?

HK: About a mile and a quarter. Everybody walked, we didn't talk about that, it was the only way you got to school, we walked.

AW: Did the children help in the farming?

HK: Yes, there were people that kept their kids home from school to help, but that didn't go over so very well. They had to be in school, so they might keep them out a day, if they had potatoes, they had to pick up potatoes, it helped a whole lot if they had extra school children to help. But that didn't happen very much.

AW: What would life have been like, both from your grandparents time and then in your time, in the house, I mean, what were the women doing?

HK: The women, oh dear, that was something! They had to carry their water for washing, and, where's my iron, that seven pound iron, you heated that on the coal stove, or a wood stove. To take care of clothes was quite a thing. I think often about the washers and dryers now, and how my mother, and that isn't even way back there, the time she spent washing and ironing. No electricity, all of the conveniences that they have now, compared to that, the women of today have got a real easy life compared to my mom and my grandma.

AW: What kinds of foods were common then?

HK: Just the basic foods. You had bread and butter and potatoes and meat and vegetables. And of course, the potatoes and vegetables, you raised those yourself. And way back in Grandpa and Grandma Rutgers day, they had to go to Allegan for flour. But when

my parent were young, there were flour mills here, they could get that. Everybody had a garden, so they had their own vegetables. You had beans and peas and sweet corn. All of those things just like they have today, not all the fancy things.

AW: Did people bring seeds with them from Europe?

HK: I really couldn't tell you that. They might have, although...

AW: Maybe from other people who were already here.

HK: Some little time ago, I went to the state capital. I didn't realize, when those people were here, that there was as much in Detroit as there was. I would say that in that way, they got there seeds and things like that because Detroit was settled long before this area. So I think that that's where they must have got their seeds, but that's just guessing, nobody told me that.

Unidentified voice: Your father owned a grocery store.

HK: Oh yes, oh yes, about that too, that picture is up in my room.

AW: What was the name of his grocery store?

HK: Rutgers and Tien. Rutgers was my Dad and Tien was my uncle and his father.

AW: Where was it located?

HK: In Graafschap. Oh that was something. When I was a kid were two great big rooms. One room was groceries, and they went to Holland and got their groceries in sacks and weighed them in the store. Then they had, we called it a peddle wagon, maybe a moving store. They had a little bit of sugar and a little bit of peas and a little bit of this and the other thing. The yard goods that came from Du Mez in Holland, they had some of that. Dad had bolts of material and he said that there were some of

these ladies that lived south of Graafschap, that he said I bought more material for housedresses and aprons. He just said, they said "I need something." And so when he went to the store, he had an order for maybe needing a new house dress and another one needed a new apron. So Dad picked it out, and he said, "I picked out stuff for all of these people, all over." They had no rubber tires or anything, a team of mules that hauled this thing all over the country.

AW: How long did he have the store?

HK: He started there when he was just a kid, maybe like boys now in carry-out, how old was he, fifteen, I don't know. Forty-five, I have to think about that just a minute (thinks out loud for a moment) Well, somewhere between, I don't know, around '45, I would think. Then they sold the store, it got to be too much. Uncle Herman's father was getting older, he couldn't keep up with it anymore. As things went on, finally, they got to the place where they bought a truck, and so the horses had to go, and it was too slow. Everything had to go faster. They could get a load of groceries from Holland in just a little while where it used to take a big part of the day. But I lived through all of those things.

AW: Did you work in the store yourself?

HK: No, I never worked in the store. After they sold the store in Graafschap, he started working at Standard Grocer, which was still in the grocery line, and he worked there for awhile, and then the depression came along. There was nothing wrong with Dad's work, but the people that owned Standard Grocer had relatives who needed a job. So, you keep your jobs for the relatives, and you let the other people go. Dad

had a small life insurance policy, and he built a little station for gas in Graafschap. And as time went on, he kept putting in more and more groceries. So back in his old age he was selling just the basics, not a great big store, but that's the way he ended his life.

AW: So he started this in the depression.

HK: This last store.

AW: The last store, and when did he close it, or when was it closed?

HK: Oh, let me see. I'll have to think on that a little bit...the boys were in high school, when would Bill have been in...

UV: The forties.

HK: In the forties, I guess, I think that, yes. Late forties when he got out of there.

UV: Because my Dad graduated in '50, or '49?

HK: Yes, and Duane and Gary were a little bit younger than that, I would think so, something like that. I'm guessing at some of these things, I don't have to say (tape fades) that's the right year.

AW: So, was this kind of a community center, in Graafschap, at the time you had the store, I mean everyone would come in and...

HK: Yes, everybody came in and they bought gas cheaper then. You could go to the station and buy a dollars worth of gas and you could get along on that for awhile. Prices were, in the depression, that was something else.

UV: She got married on the day the stock market crashed. Hmm, just a coincidence. (laughter)

HK: Stockmarket, yes, that's right.

UV: Tell too, about how they rolled the parsonage across the parking lot, from your house.

HK: You mean, where I live?

UV: Yes.

HK: The old parsonage in Graafschap was pretty old, so they had to have a new one for the minister. My Dad bought the old parsonage and...how do I explain that? They put rollers underneath it with a turnstyle, and the horses went around and around that thing and hauled that thing from where it was across from the church to where it is now.

AW: It's still there?

HK: Oh, yes, it's still there. I still like that old house.

AW: They had it on pieces of wood that they rolled, or logs or what?

HK: Logs, something that rolled, and they had a frame underneath to hold up the house, and then the rollers underneath. Somedays it didn't move very far, because it was moved in the spring, and you know what kind of mud there is in Graafschap.

AW: Before we move on a little bit to your own life, are there any other stories that you remember, or things that happened with the early settlers?

UV: Tell them about the Scholten's, they had Rivulet-Hurst, that area there.

HK: Rivulet-Hurst, the dairy, do they still call it Rivulet-Hurst? My grandmother's people, came to this little knoll up there. That's where the name Rivulet-Hurst comes from. I don't know if it's that way now, but I remember going down there and there

was this little bridge over a little stream here. That's where the Scholten's, that's my mom's grandparents, that's where they settled when they came to the Holland area. Grandpa DeFrell had a sister, Alice DeFrell, she wound up in Holland. They built a house on the corner of Tenth and Washington, kitty corner from the Cappon House, but that was about the first house in the area. When people from Graafschap walked to Holland, they came to that house. She said she always had the coffeepot on because people had walked from there, through the woods, in these trails, and then they would stop there for a cup of coffee, and go to the store and pick up whatever they needed, stop back for a cup of coffee and walk back to Graafschap.

AW: She must have had a lot of coffee.

HK: She said that, she said one time she tried to guess how many cups of coffee she made, of course, she didn't know. I don't know how come they went to Holland, and what Mr. Vander Hill did for a living, how they could afford to, I guess they hauled the wood to Singapore and brought it back home again, and built a house there. Then, if you think about how they build houses today.

AW: It's a different way.

HK: A different way.

AW: How did you meet your husband?

HK: Just like all girls and boys get together. The girls were in Graafschap and Floyd was in Hamilton, and the boys decided to come to Graafschap and see what the girls looked like. We met this one and we met that one. There was no formal introduction or anything like that, but we just decided that we liked each other.

UV: Her husband was a handsome man.

HK: I'm short and he was tall, so we didn't make a very good couple.

AW: So, was it love at first sight?

HK: No, no, that came as you got to know each other and talk to each other and things like that.

AW: Didn't the teenagers go down to Eighth St, too, on Sunday nights, once in awhile?

HK: Oh yes, I think after the boys had a date, they all got together, what was the restaurant? The Boston Restaurant, now the Windmill Restaurant. On Sunday night they all got together to talk over what they'd done, what kind of girls they met, and what they thought about this girl and that girl. Boston Restaurant, that's where they all got together. But the girls didn't go there, that was just the boys that went there.

AW: So, were you courting for sometime? Or...

HK: Oh yes, that took awhile to get together. How long did I know Floyd? I met him and then I had this business course, and then you studied, and then you didn't do anything else, so I didn't see him again for, I don't know, maybe almost a year. And then we got back again to talking to each other.

AW: Where did you take a business course?

HK: Holland Business College was on the third floor above the old Woolworth store. It was taught by Mr. Hoeksema, and it was tough. You studied, you ate, and you slept for ten months.

AW: Do you recall what year that was? Where you in your twenties, maybe?

HK: Yes, I think so. It didn't last a long time. It wasn't there for years and years, it was

just something that this man did on his own.

AW: I think you told me you were employed, for awhile, I mean outside your home, I'm sure you were busy there.

HK: Yes, before I was married, I worked at Holland Furnace. I started there in, I don't know, maybe in '26. I worked there for three years, I know that.

AW: Who was the president of Holland furnace at that time?

HK: A. H. Lanwere was still there, and Nystrom. Was Timmer still doing bookwork? I'm not sure of that, but Lanwere and Nystrom were brothers, and oh, Cola! Cola was the father-in-law of Lanwere and Nystrom. Then the big shots still did a lot of their own work. I think those were the good days for Holland Furnace. But when they got prosperous, made money, whatever, they got more and more branches around the country, then it didn't go so good anymore.

AW: Was that while you were still there or after you had left?

HK: By the time I left, that's when Nystrom's wife was Cola's daughter, and they were divorced. Then Mrs. Nystrom married Ted Chef. The story was she was 42 and he was 24. But anyway, the original founders of Holland Furnace, I don't know if I should say they were let go or anything, younger people took over. Then I think the real good days for Holland Furnace, they went downhill.

AW: What kind of work did you do when you were there?

HK: I worked in accounting. I checked bank statements, we had bank statements in over five hundred different banks in the country. All those reports came to Holland, the money finally came and it was all deposited in the banks here. So I worked on those

kinds of things.

AW: What kind of salary would you have gotten in that time?

HK: I started work for twelve dollars a week, an when I quit I was earning seventeen-fifty. We worked five days a week, and every once in awhile on a Saturday morning. I rode to work with a neighbor, but on Saturday when we got our pay, we went downtown to get our check cashed and picked up whatever we wanted, and then walked home to Graafschap, which was five miles.

AW: Were there a lot of women working there?

HK: Oh yes. I don't know, more than a hundred. I don't know if there were two hundred, but there were a lot. But they had a big business, all of these branches and the furnaces were all shipped out of Holland. They were all made in Holland, in the foundry there. So, it was quite a business. It was a nice place to work. You always had some crabby bosses, and some that were nice. (laughter)

AW: When you married you left Holland Furnace, is that right?

HK: I left Holland Furnace and I moved to Hamilton.

AW: You said your husband had a farm?

HK: A small farm.

AW: And he was a carpenter also?

HK: Yes, he also did carpentry work, and the two didn't go together very well, because you were busy in the summer on both jobs. It was a small farm. It wasn't big enough to make a living, so you did some carpenter work too. We worked hard.

AW: From your perspective, living in this area a long time, what changes stand out in

your mind, over time, with Holland in particular? How is it different now?

HK: It's so busy! Life was much slower then. Life was nicer when I was young. Before we were married, I have friends there in Graafschap, and if there were any nice program or something here in Holland, we walked to Holland for an evening for something. That was four miles, we walked home in the dark. We never thought to be afraid, ever! It was such a nice, safe, comfortable world. If you think about doing that now today, you wouldn't attempt that, to walk four miles in the dark, just a bunch of girls, alone. You wouldn't do that. No life was really nice then.

AW: What do you think about the diversity of Holland today, in terms of people's backgrounds?

HK: There are people here that resent people who aren't Dutch. Floyd and I never felt that way. When we got older, we spent several winters in Brewton, Alabama, volunteer work in a mission school. I never had that feeling against some of these people, and there is a feeling like that in Holland. I think why don't we learn to live together instead of trying to keep our own little group together. But, that's my idea, I can't say that...

[Tape ends]

AW: Mission school, was that through your involvement in a church?

HK: Yes, at that time we were members of the Hamilton Reformed Church, and the Reformed Church had built a church in Brewton, Alabama, because the black kids didn't have a school there. They had churches, they did have churches, but these black kids weren't allowed in school until they were older. By that time, they

couldn't learn anymore. So the Reformed Church built this church and a dormitory for girls. They had no people for repair work or anything like that. A good friend of Floyd's, a high school friend, stopped there and saw how bad things were. He said to Floyd, "Why don't we go down there for a little bit some winter time and take care of some of that. And, oh, they needed that help so bad. A door into the church had such a big hole that a dog could get in it. We were going to go home and the minister said to Floyd, "Please stay another day and fix that door!" We went with a trailer because we didn't know about living conditions and how we were going to live. But when we got there, the director of the school, who was black, said, "I wish so much you would have the room in the girls dormitory. We have a nice room for you, he said it would do so much for both the white people here in town and for the black people, if you would live in the dorm with the girls. So we did that, and they were very nice to us. We had some real good black friends - teachers in the school, and the kids too. Of course, we had another kind of experience too, but then you don't remember that when all the other things are so much better. One time Floyd went out the door and he said, "I thought I put that hood down on that pickup, and when he looked, the battery was gone." Somebody took it, and we bought a new one. We had insurance, so we bought a new one. The next summer, some of these black people came over here to visit. One of the workers there, he said to Floyd, "We got your battery back again!" He said, "Those kids who took it tried to sell it to somebody that handled used batteries," and that man knew the story, he knew that somebody had taken our battery, and he said, "We brought it back to you." So that's

the kind of experiences, one of them that we had with those kids.

AW: Were you a retirement age when you went down there?

HK: Yes, we were. Some winters we went a couple weeks, sometimes we went a couple months. And of course, when you got there, they always had more things for us to do, for Floyd especially, then what we had time for. There were other white people too, from the Grand Rapids area. There was a lady from Standard Hardware, she worked there a whole lot with these young people. She, maybe I'm just rambling on...

AW: No you're not!

HK: Anyway, she came to Floyd one time, and she said, "Floyd, I wish that you would go to that church basement." They had preschool for some of these black kids because the black kids were not allowed into school until the first grade, and all the other kids have had preschool or whatever Those kids started school being way behind. So in this church, they had a black lady teaching these younger kids so when they get to first grade they knew what they were supposed to know. But she said, "They just have no place to keep their clothes." She said, "They lay their clothes on the floor." She said, "I'll give you a check, signed, and you go to the lumber yard and you get some kind of a little thing, that the kids can hang up their clothes and put their books in there, that they don't have to put it on the floor." So that was another white lady that was doing something for the black people. She just gave Floyd a check, and signed it and said, "Just pick up what ever you need." So it was a worthwhile thing. We felt as if we had really done something good.

AW: Was the church quite important in your life as a family?

HK: Oh yes! The church is very important. I guess that goes back to our background. They left Europe because they couldn't worship the way they felt they should, and wanted to. And that's the way we grew up. We can't make it without the church, and without the Lord. That's what you fall back on when you have any bad things or the hard things in life. That's our background, and I'm thankful for my parents and my grandparents, for all the things they did, so that we could have what we have. That's the big thing in my life, that's at the bottom of everything, that's the foundation.

AW: I think that that kind of brings us full circle. I'd like to just ask you one more question then. Thinking about Holland in the future, what do you think it may be like here?

HK: That I don't know. I don't know what to say about that.

AW: What would you like to see it be like?

HK: Well, for one thing, the violence, all the things with the young people. They have to have a better foundation than what they have. And some of these people came out of bad situations, but you don't have to stay in that kind of situation. You don't have to stay that way. Our ancestors didn't want that kind of a living religiously, but you don't have to have that either. Government supporting everybody. You don't have to work for a living if the government will take care of you. Get busy, and take care of yourself. It's good that there is help for people that need help, but don't go through life expecting the government to.... And I think you see more and more of that as

time goes on that people just depend on those kind of things. You don't have to work if the government will give you a hand out, then you don't have to work. So, I would like to see a different, what shall I say...

AW: A different attitude? Is there anything else that you'd like to say that I haven't asked, or that comes to mind since we've been talking?

HK: I talk much too much...(to UV) Can you think of anything that I've talked to you about?

UV: Maybe one thing they might be interested in, maybe you covered this too, but in her family there's a lot of independence, from way back, where they own their own businesses. Lokker Rutgers was from her background, and her father owned a grocery store. My brother owned his own business, and my dad did, I did.

HK: Yeah, I guess we're kind of independent. Wanting to do our own thing.

UV: Call it Ang veis (stubborn, independent).

HK: That's what Duane told me I was Ang veis. Now is there a good English word for that?

UV: I don't know, independence is the only thing. And your husband owned his own business too.

HK: Oh yes, that's right, sure!

AW: Maybe, just tell us a little about Lokker Rutgers, because certainly that's woven through along time of Holland's history. What's your recollection of that?

HK: It was a men's clothing store. And everybody in Holland, and everything around, everybody bought their clothes there, the men, at Lokker Rutgers. That was the only

place that you went to. That has changed a whole lot in my lifetime because I remember those stores.

AW: And that was your father or his father?

HK: No, wait a minute, it was uncle John. That was my father's brother, my uncle, Lokker Rutgers, that Rutgers, the original Rutgers in there, was my uncle.

AW: And what was his first name?

HK: John. Johannes was the Dutch name, but of course, when he got here, he was John.

AW: So that was what he founded after he came, or as he grew to be an adult, he founded that store?

HK: And Lokker was also one of the early people here, and I think they just got together, and said they think they ought to have a store. Maybe at first they only had overalls and socks. Who knows? I don't know that, I'm just saying that. But the thing kept on growing and got bigger and bigger.

AW: Did any of your brothers work in the store? Or other people in your family?

HK: No, my Dad's store, by the time Dad got that on, the boys were older, and they had their own jobs. Fred sold cars all of his life, that was his thing. Tony drove truck for Holland Motor for years. He drove truck for awhile, and then we got into the depression, and then he got back to work, he loaded freight, from morning 'til night for a dollar a day. That's the way he got started again, after that depression. But I think between my brothers and my sons and groceries and trucking and cars, Fred sold cars all his life, Tony trucked, we talk about that...Floyd (husband) and Dale (son), they had to be their own boss. I guess we were an independent bunch.

AW: What's your own recollections of the time of the depression?

HK: They were hard, they were very, very, very hard. And that's when Dad lost his job, and with that life insurance policy which he came into, he got into what started as the a gas station, and a grocery store. It was small, but my dad brought up six children, and they were very, very careful what they did with their money. But they never went to the government for anything. They had money to take care of themselves, through their sicknesses, and they had money to bury themselves. That's what this whole thing did to my parents. I think that they made me what I am today. Ang veis...independent, want to do my own thing. Does that make sense, if I put it that way? I wish that things were more like they were some years ago. I was happier then, than what I am with the way things are. I have a good place to live, I've got plenty of to eat, I've got clothes, and I think that's all you can ask from life.

AW: How was your family impacted by the war?

HK: When they had to register for the draft, my husband, and all of my brothers and Grad (Gradus), Ruth's husband, they were all in that age where they had to register for the draft. Harvey, my youngest brother, was in the service for over five years, but he spent most of that time in Alaska, just being there, because it was so close to Japan. Grad, my brother-in-law, was on the first crew ship that went down in the Pacific. His best buddy didn't make it. Kenneth Tien, my cousin, was on a sub. That went down in the China Sea and we never heard from him again. But those years were good for the people that stayed home, they made good money. But we didn't get into any of that.

UV: But you had said that was kind of a sad time.

HK: Oh yes, my sister, she's fourteen years younger than I am, but I said for her, it was sad. She was younger, my parents were older, and my brother spent five years in the service. Your friends and everybody had somebody in the service, and things were bad, a lot of boys didn't come home. So I always say for Ruth, she spent her youth, her young years, when you could have been happy, just hearing about all things that were happening in the war. Then when the ship went down, Grad, her boyfriend, we didn't hear anything from him for a long time, and he had a tough time. He was in Hiroshima the day after they dropped the bomb there. He spent a lot of time in the service. But they came home again. But Kenneth Tien never did, and that was a cousin who I babysat for him a lot, it was a cousin that we were really close to, and knew real well. They were really sad years. And it was a long time.

AW: Was there a sort of a homefront impact in terms of shortages and rationing?

HK: Oh goodness, yes! (laughter) Sure there was ration, and some people had an awful time with that, and coffee was rationed, and...

UV: Tires...

HK: Tires and gas! But we came through pretty good, because Floyd had a ration card because he had pernicious anemia. From the time he was thirty-one, until he died had a shot once a month. Our tires were pretty bad on the car, but Dr. Kimme gave him a ration card and he could go to Allegan and get new tires, and he could get extra gas, because he needed to get a doctor so often. So it didn't hurt us so much. But we had a lot of friends who would really like to come for even just a gallon of

gas. But we made that too, we lived through that too.

AW: Do you have a lot of family reunions?

HK: Yes, we did, I think the ladies more, my mom and her sisters, and those kind of things. But later years, oh yes! (to UV) When your family was out there in Hamilton, we had a lot of hamburger fries and things didn't we? I've got to shut up! I've been talking much too much!

AW: I've taken longer than I said I would, but I certainly appreciate it. It's been very, very interesting, and I know they'll be happy to have it in the Archives. So, thank you very much, and I'll shut this off, and...

HK: One reason I talk so much is, I took care of the kids often, you know, and what do you do when you take care of the kids? They want to do something, so you tell them stories.

AW: (To UV) You were lucky! (laughter)

[End of Tape]

Room 221, Resthaven, 32nd & College; 392-5726

Initial Contact Form

Name: Harriet Kempkers

Date of birth: 1908 Place of birth: Graafschap

Mother's name: Susan DeFrell Rutgers (Susie)

Father's name: Fred Rutgers

Siblings: 4 brothers (Anthony "Tony", b. Oct. 23, 1910; Fred, b. September 10, 1912; Stan, b. Dec. 1, 1914; Harvey, b. Dec. 24, 1917) and 1 sister (Ruth, b. [date removed] ; Ruth married Gradus Knoll). All four brothers are deceased.

Spouse's name: Floyd Kempkers

Date of marriage: November 27, 1929, at parents' home in Holland

Children's names, birthdates:

- Dale, July 26, 1931 (deceased); wife Tressa (she has remarried & is now Tressa Bolt).
- Duane, [date removed] ; not married at present
- Gary, October 2, 1939 (deceased), wife Helen Rose.

Grandchildren: Nine grandchildren and "quite a few" great-grandchildren.

Religion, church membership: Hamilton Reformed, then Haven Reformed. She and her husband worked in a mission school in Alabama for short periods after they retired.

Schooling: the old Maplewood School; took a 10-month business course in Holland.

Residential history: Lived in Graafschap (Holland address), then Hamilton, now back in Holland at Resthaven.

Occupational history (chronological, place of work, type of work, approximate salary)

- Husband: ran small farm; was a carpenter
- Harriet: worked in accounting department at Holland Furnace from 1926 to 1929; her weekly salary was $12 to $17 dollars.

Other general information: Her uncle John (Johannes) was a founder of Lokker-Rutgers store in Holland. Her grandparents came from the Netherlands in about 1847, knew about VanRaalte's settling in Holland.